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TAGS: [MARR](#) [MOPS](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [TU](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: [TURKISH CHIEF OF STAFF PUTS THE MILITARY BACK IN POLITICS](#)

Classified By: Ambassador Ross Wilson, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: Turkey's Chief of Staff General Yasar Buyukanit in an hour-long televised speech to assembled military brass and press at the General Staff headquarters on April 12 addressed the military's three-decade long fight against terrorism, defended the military from accusations of wrongdoing, and spoke publicly for the first time about the Presidential election. Buyukanit took the opportunity to criticize European policy towards the Kurds and, implicitly, US intervention in Iraq. The CHOD stated that a Turkish military operation in northern Iraq against the PKK "would be useful" but would require parliamentary approval. He dismissed recent public accusations of wrongdoing by the military as attempts to cause a clash between the military and the government. Buyukanit insisted the President should respect the secular, democratic, unitary structure of the Republic. This speech will generate significant press and may add pressure to Erdogan on a both a cross-border operation and the presidency, but it also revealed a somewhat beleaguered CHOD forced to acknowledge that both decisions are up to the politicians, not the military. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) GEN Buyukanit held his first televised press conference since taking office in September 2006 just days before the April 16 start of the Presidential nomination period. His remarks came one month after a speech to the War College in Istanbul that was not televised, according to General Staff statements at that time, because Buyukanit did not want to appear to interfere in the political process. Today's press conference was billed as a opportunity for the CHOD to refute allegations that four former generals had plotted a coup against the current government in 2004 but Buyukanit spent the first thirty minutes on the history and current state of terrorism in Turkey.

ON THE OFFENSIVE AGAINST THE PKK  
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13. (C) Buyukanit underscored that terrorism has economic, social, political and educational dimensions, and emphasized that Turkey must combat all aspects in order to succeed, but he lambasted Europe for its "efforts to create minorities in Turkey." Buyukanit outlined the six elements of the fight against terrorism as: ensuring the political and military will; rendering collaborators or militia forces ineffective; psychological warfare; cutting off external financial and political support in northern Iraq, Turkey and Europe; breaking their spirit; and ensuring the necessary legal

authorities of the security forces. He listed the number of military "martyrs" over the past decades and the 10 soldiers killed in anti-PKK operations in southeast this past week-end. According to Buyukanit, Turkish intelligence sources predict an escalation of PKK attacks in May. In anticipation, he said, operations are already underway in an attempt to render the terrorists ineffective by then.

¶4. (C) Without specifically taking the US to task, Buyukanit blamed the current terrorism in Turkey on the first Gulf War; Operations Provide Comfort and Northern Watch, which allowed the PKK to flourish in northern Iraq; and Operation Iraqi Freedom. A victim of its geography, he said, Turkey watched the PKK gain freedom of movement, arms and ammunition from the former Iraqi army, and the support of "a Kurdish group" in the region (i.e., the KDP).

¶5. (C) Regarding a cross-border operation (CBO), Buyukanit said "We cannot accept what (Barzani) said. From a military perspective, an operation in northern Iraq would be useful." However, he said, there is also a political perspective which must also be considered and which requires a legal decision by Parliament. The Turkish Armed Forces have the ability and the capacity to "undertake that duty, if that duty is given to the Armed Forces legally." Buyukanit did not indicate whether the General Staff had requested permission from the government to conduct a CBO.

#### THREATS TO THE MILITARY UNDERMINE THE STATE

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¶6. (C) Buyukanit defended the military against the public accusations and legal charges leveled over the past two years, including Buyukanit's purported interference in the

ANKARA 00000861 002 OF 002

judicial process following the Semdinli book store bombing; a slander campaign against several generals; the "outing" of the military's media vetting process; and the recent allegation that four former generals plotted a coup against the Justice and Development Party (AKP) government in 2004. Calling the accusations "mud slinging," he warned that the "enemies of Ataturk" who authored these accusations are attempting to cause a split between the military and government that will serve no one. The Turkish Armed Forces are a basic pillar of the Republic. If this pillar collapses, Buyukanit said, it would weaken the balance of the state.

#### COMMANDER IN CHIEF MUST RESPECT ATATURK'S PRINCIPLES

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¶7. (C) Buyukanit, who has until now made great show of refraining from comment on the upcoming Parliamentary selection of a President, chose to break his silence four days before the start of the nomination process. He reminded his audience of the military's loyalty to the secular, democratic and unitary state established by Ataturk and hoped that the new President and Commander-in-Chief would be loyal to those principles. Without naming names, Buyukanit claimed that "we are confident that such a president shall be elected." After laying out the qualifications of the military's ideal candidate, however, Buyukanit acknowledged that there is a legal, democratic process for selecting the President and that the military can only "hope" that someone who shares their values will be chosen. During a subsequent q&a session, Buyukanit refused to answer questions about specific candidates or the military response to a headscarf-wearing resident in the Presidential palace.

#### INITIAL RESPONSE FROM AN AKP OFFICIAL

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¶8. (C) Shortly after the speech, AKP vice chair Dengir Mir Mehmet Firat downplayed Buyukanit's remarks. In his view, one must look at the country and the circumstances, and, in

that light, this was exactly the type of speech one would expect from the Chief of Staff at this juncture. The values the CHOD described were, he stated, precisely those that AKP and Tayyip Erdogan embody -- both are the product of a democratic, secular republic, without which they could not exist. He said the time has passed when Turkey can be anything but democratic with an open market economy. It is so interconnected with the global economy that any attempt to shut it off from the world would reverberate instantly.

COMMENT

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¶9. (C) At a time when a new movie about the 1980 coup is about to premier here, Buyukanit's speech seems to hearken back to the days when the military had the decisive voice in Turkey's political process. The Armed Forces can still rattle the saber but their ability to wield it to influence or change the domestic scene is diminished. In advance of a Presidential election in which the candidate whose wife wears a headscarf has a good chance of winning, the military feels compelled to remind everyone that it is a pillar of the state whose voice must be considered. While Buyukanit may be seen here as throwing down the gauntlet at Erdogan over the Presidency, he did not name him specifically or make any threat. He was on the defensive about accusations besmirching the military's honor. In the end, the only weapon the military can wield is its voice in the hope that its words still resonate.

¶10. (C) Regarding a cross-border attack on the PKK, Buyukanit's assertion that it would be useful is noteworthy, but not an obvious change in his approach to the issue. Nevertheless, it will be important to reassert our oft-stated view that such action could aggravate Iraq's instability and reiterate our commitment to collaborative work among Turkey, Iraq and the US. END COMMENT.

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